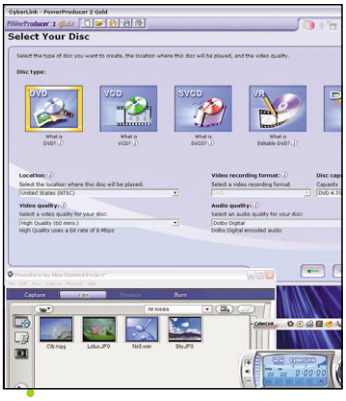
by Kevin Savetz

CyberLink DVD Solution



DVD Solution
Price TBA
CyberLink
www.gocyberlink.com

CyberLink is known for its easy-to-use video-editing and DVD apps. DVD Solution is a bundle of assorted video and DVD software—some old, some new. Alone, many of the programs have received positive reviews. Together they make a potent, well-rounded suite for creating content and burning DVDs.

The package includes two video-editing apps. PowerProducer 2 Gold is aimed at users who want to convert videotapes to digital format, perform basic video editing, and add simple menus before burning those videos to DVD. PowerDirector 3 is for users that want more control over special effects, color adjustment, transitions, and other video-editing features. Both programs lean toward ease-of-use over raw power.

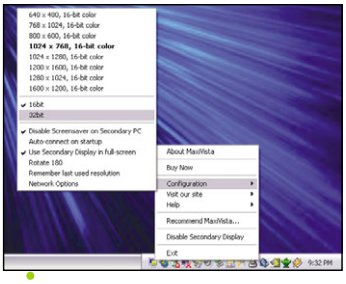
PowerDVD 5 is a DVD player that supports Dolby audio, surround sound, dual subtitles, and other features. There's also Medi@Show for creating and viewing multimedia slideshows and Power2Go for drag-and-drop burning of data, music, and movie CDs and DVDs.

Two new backup utilities are included in the mix, but both have problems. PowerDVD Copy duplicates DVDs. It includes options for customizing the output size and selecting which languages and subtitles to include, but it can't dupe copy-protected DVDs, an understandable but annoying limitation. PowerBackup is supposed to back up data from your PC to CDs or DVDs, but I couldn't get it to work consistently. Some backups failed without a reasonable explanation, and the backup scheduler didn't work at all.

Another new app, PhotoNow, is for fine-tuning digital images. It includes manual and one-click automatic adjustments, but some of its automatic tweaks, such as Auto Balance, were consistently horrible on my digicam images. Also, the program can't do batch conversions, making it useless for manipulating more than one or two pictures at a time.

Despite some hiccups, DVD Solution includes some quality tools, with PowerDirector and PowerDVD leading the pack. The package could be very useful to anyone who wants to get more from her DVD burner. Cyberlink plans to offer Silver, Gold, and Platinum suite versions that are expected to cost $39.95 to $249.95. ▲

Bartels Media MaxiVista 1.0.17



MaxiVista 1.0.17
$49.95
Bartels Media
www.maxivista.com

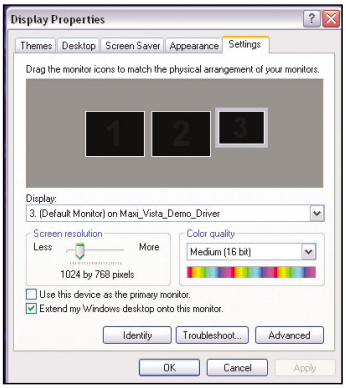
Many notebooks include a video-out port that lets you attach an external monitor. With two screens you can enjoy the luxury of a huge Desktop workspace. MaxiVista adds a why-didn't-I-think-of-that corollary feature: It makes your notebook's screen act as a secondary monitor for another PC.

Just put a notebook running MaxiVista's viewer software on your desk. Then, run the server software on your desktop PC. Voila, the notebook acts like a second monitor for the desktop. If there are already two monitors connected to your desktop, the notebook acts as a third. In fact, if your notebook can drive an external monitor, MaxiVista can give you a three- or four-screen configuration. You can also flip the viewer screen's image upside down (useful for using a Tablet PC as the secondary screen) and arrange the relative screen positions using the Display Control Panel.

To run MaxiVista, the primary PC needs Windows 2000/2003/XP, while the viewer PC can be running Win98/NT4/Me/2000/2003/XP, which makes MaxiVista a great way to put an older notebook to good use. Both machines need to be connected to your LAN. For now, the program supports only one secondary PC.

The utility doesn't support hardware acceleration on the secondary screen, so it may not work well with fast-moving games. On rare occasions I noticed minor visual glitches when quickly dragging a window, but this was resolved immediately. My only other problem was when the Desktop went idle and returned to the Welcome screen, which caused MaxiVista's connection to the notebook to be lost. Disabling the Welcome screen after the screen saver kicked in resolved the issue.

MaxiVista costs $49.95. A free 30-day trial version is available for download. The program is a smart idea turned into a useful program. If you have a second system lying around, it's an inexpensive and flexible way to add elbowroom to your Windows Desktop without investing in a new monitor and video card. ▲



CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect